

Senate Testimony --- Corrections Officer Training Funds

Good afternoon, I am Jackson County Sheriff Dan Heyns.

MR CHAIRMAN /DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS/THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME

THIS OPPORTUNITY TO Address you on a very important topic regarding training for Michigan's county jail personnel.

I have been Sheriff for eight years and have spent a total of thirty-three years in law enforcement and corrections at the county level. I am currently serving on the Corrections Officer Training Council representing mid sized jails.

When P.A. 125 The Local Corrections Officer Training Act was passed by the Michigan Legislature in 2003, its goal was to improve the training opportunities for Sheriff's Deputies assigned to work in county jails.

Probably one of the least understood and most under appreciated public employees; jail corrections officers labor under stressful and dangerous conditions without the benefit of the professional training extended to

their road patrol counterparts. In fact, the ability to create additional training for our jail personnel was so important, the Michigan Sheriffs' Association and The Deputy Sheriffs Association (DSAM) decided to work together in order to create a vehicle to 1) raise revenue for training and 2) create a Sheriffs' training council that would administer the program so we could maintain the integrity of the necessary training. Both organizations were in lock step agreement these components were vital to the success of the program.

The road to upgrading and professionalizing this position has been a long and neglected one but we are making great progress thanks to P.A. 125. Utilizing the booking fees made available through the Public Act, Sheriff's have doubled, tripled and sometimes even quadrupled the amount of training formerly extended to jail employees. A training curriculum has been developed through thoughtful consideration by an Advisory Committee established by the Council and approved by the Council. As part of the original agreement, DSAM has representation on both the Advisory Committee and the Council. Basic training academies have met or exceeded standards as set by the Council. Trainers are reviewed and approved by a vigorous screening process. Over 97 percent of corrections officers have met certification standards and almost 90 percent have met or exceeded the in-service training requirements as set by the Council. The in-service training numbers have risen dramatically over the life of the Act (up from 45% in 2005 to nearly 90%). However, DSAM, the very organization that stood side by side with the Sheriffs to create a mechanism to properly train jail personnel, has resorted to repeated lawsuits that effectively halt any corrections training.

Stopping the training has a very negative impact on all counties, but particularly the smaller counties who have the most critical training needs. In other words, an Act created with specific intent to distribute training monies to areas in need has been blocked by the very organization (DSAM) who was pleading with the Sheriffs to create more training opportunities.

I would compare this obstruction to the food sitting on the tarmac in earthquake stricken Port of Prince because the Haitian bureaucrats would not release it to the people who needed it most. Can you remember the frustration of that fiasco?

With the strong support of the Sheriffs and DSAM, P.A. 125 put the primary responsibility and authority for the dispensation of training funds in the most appropriate hands... County Sheriffs. My counter parts and I are responsible for the safe and humane operation of our

facilities. When a lawsuit is served for an alleged violation of rights,
it is the Sheriff who is the named defendant, not a jail Deputy. A Sheriff gets a report card every four years from their constituents,
it is called an election. Among other things, Sheriffs are graded on their
management of the jail operation. A wise mentor of mine once said,
"A jail can never get you elected but it can sure get you defeated". My fellow Sheriffs and I clearly recognize it is folly to misappropriate training funds directed toward our jails. We fully recognize the revenue
is to be used for training purposes, and most if not all of my colleagues would testify that the number of jail related incidents have
plummeted since these funds have been made available to better train our
jail personnel.

This Public Act has accomplished exactly what the Sheriffs and DSAM originally envisioned when we jointly approached the legislature to help
solve a training void within county jails. To now hear DSAM contend the
program needs dramatic change and that they don't believe the money is
being well-spent is surprising and quite frankly, disingenuous, especially because they currently sit on the Council and never bring up
these issues in the Council meetings.

While we have endeavored to work with DSAM over the years on issues of importance to law enforcement, it has always been a bit puzzling exactly
who DSAM represents. DSAM is often referred to as a union organization,
but in fact, they represent no collective bargaining units, negotiate no
contracts, resolve no grievances ...in short DSAM performs none of the traditional union functions. According to state documents, DSAM is a registered telemarketing organization. They raise money via telephone

solicitation and spend it on various activities to promote their organization. When I investigated their most recent nonprofit 990 form

(2008) I found they spent vast majority of money on legal fees (\$27,264)

and lobbying (\$57,500). They also ran up a bill of \$82,877 to make "appearances before legislative committees". The information doesn't reveal any relationship with corrections officers or training

components, which is even further indicative by the legal blocks they have thrown up to increased training for county jail personnel, the very individuals who they claim to represent.

I, like most of my fellow Sheriffs, have spent a career working in county jail corrections. We walk through our facilities daily, talk to our officers, consult with their supervisors, interact with the inmates, and justify our expenditures to a host of accountants and ultimately answer to the voters. Who is better suited to make decisions about jail

officer training funds? Who is the least likely to abuse them? I submit

it is the people who are duly elected by the people and provided for by the state constitution; the Sheriffs of the State of Michigan.

MR CHAIRMAN, THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY AND I'm WILLING TO ANSWER ANY